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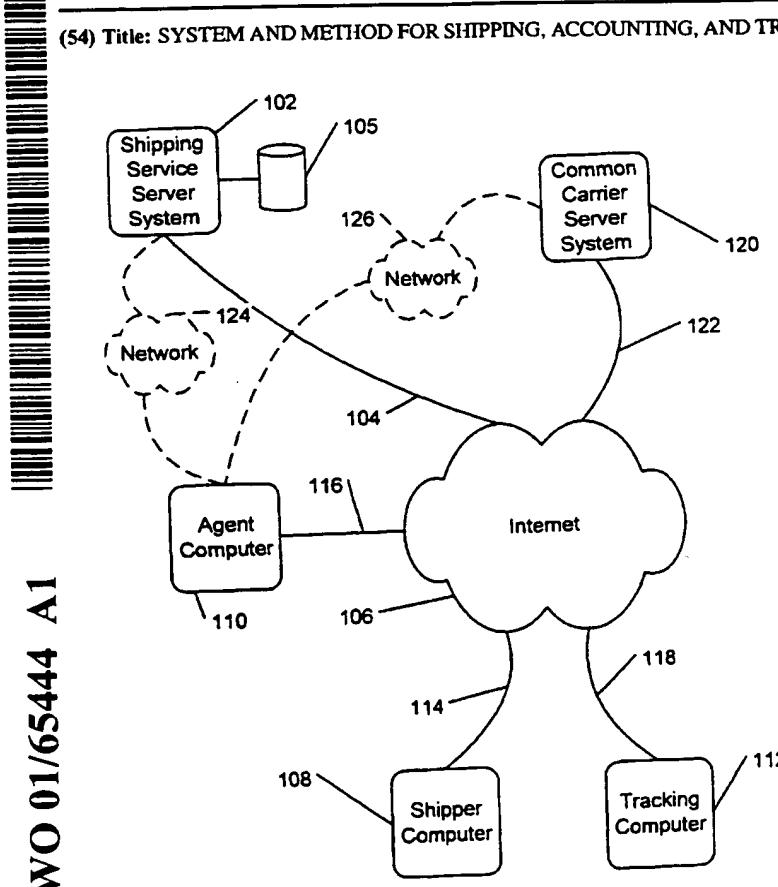
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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR SHIPPING, ACCOUNTING, AND TRACKING COMMON CARRIER SHIPMENTS



(57) Abstract: A method is provided in a server system (102, 120) for facilitating a parcel shipment (figure 6) using any one of several common carriers (204). The method includes providing shipping information (202) from a remote device (110) over a communications network (106) to a server system (102, 120) and selecting one of the common carriers (204) to ship the parcel (figure 6). The method includes creating a tracking number (212) for the shipment (figure 6) and sending the tracking number (212) to the remote device (110).

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## SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR SHIPPING, ACCOUNTING, AND TRACKING COMMON CARRIER SHIPMENTS

### CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 The present invention disclosure claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. \_\_\_\_\_, (Attorney Docket Number 6969-020800US) entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR SHIPPING, ACCOUNTING, AND TRACKING COMMON CARRIER SHIPMENTS," filed February 28, 2000, and is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

10

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to parcel shipping. In particular, the present invention relates to systems and methods, in a client/server environment, for shipping parcels and tracking parcels.

15 Numerous common carriers, including the United States Post Office, provide substantially the same services for the collection, transportation, and delivery of parcels. However, each common carrier utilizes its own unique systems for payment, accounting, billing, tracking of parcels, and reporting the delivery of a parcel. As a result, shippers of parcels are confronted with a confusing multiplicity of procedures, accounting  
20 systems, and tracking systems.

Some common carriers currently employ internet shipping systems that allow a shipper to arrange for a shipment through a web server system operated by the common carrier. In these internet shipping systems, a shipper, using a computer connected with the internet and running web browsing software, accesses a website of the  
25 common carrier. The shipper provides to the common carrier's web server system shipping information for a desired parcel shipment. This shipping information may include a recipient name, a recipient address, a shipper name, a shipper address, a class of service (e.g. overnight delivery, ground delivery, air delivery), a parcel type (e.g. letter, package), package dimensions, and a declared value of the parcel. Additionally, the  
30 shipper provides payment information to the common carrier's web server system. The payment information may include, for example, a credit card number. Alternatively, the shipper may set up an account with the common carrier and receive an account number. This provides the shipper with the convenience of being billed for shipments periodically,

rather than on a shipment-by-shipment basis. If the shipper has an account number with the common carrier, the shipper may opt to have the shipment billed to that account.

After the shipper has provided the appropriate information to the common carrier's web server system and has elected to go forward with the shipment, the web server system provides to the shipper a tracking number for the parcel. This tracking number allows the shipper, or some other interested party (e.g. the recipient) to obtain, from the common carrier, information about the parcel and its shipment. For example, the recipient may use the tracking number to obtain from the common carrier an approximate location of the parcel. Additionally, the shipper may use the tracking number to obtain from the common carrier confirmation of delivery.

Also, a common carrier's website may provide to the shipper information regarding options for surrendering the parcel to the common carrier. For example, the website may provide a phone number for arranging a pickup of the parcel by the common carrier. The website may also provide locations at which the shipper may surrender the parcel to the common carrier.

However, not all common carriers provide to their customers an option to arrange for shipping using the internet. Thus, a shipper may not be able to use the internet to arrange for a shipment using a particular common carrier. Additionally, of the common carriers that do provide such an option, each operates a separate web server system. As a result, a shipper wishing to ship parcels using multiple carriers must access multiple websites, may enter redundant shipping information multiple times, may set up multiple accounts, and receive multiple bills. Additionally, to obtain tracking information of multiple parcels, the shipper and other interested parties must maintain not only the respective tracking numbers, but also the respective common carriers employed to ship the respective parcels. Moreover, in order for a shipper to compare the cost of shipping a parcel using various common carriers, the shipper must first inquire from each common carrier individually, and then compare costs.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to parcel shipping. In particular, the present invention relates to systems and methods, in a client/server environment, for shipping parcels and tracking parcels using a plurality of common carriers.

According to an embodiment of the invention, a method in a server system for facilitating a shipment of a parcel using any one of a plurality of common carriers is

provided. The method includes receiving shipping information from a remote device connected, over a communications network, to said server system and selecting one of said plurality of common carriers to ship said parcel. The method also includes creating a tracking number associated with said shipment and providing to said remote device said tracking number.

According to another embodiment of the invention, a method in a remote device for arranging for the shipment of a parcel is provided. The method comprises accessing a server system connected, over a communications network, to said remote device and providing shipping information to said server system. The method also includes receiving from said server system a list of common carriers for shipping said parcel, selecting a common carrier from said list, and providing to said server system said selected common carrier. The method further includes receiving, from said server system, a tracking number for obtaining, from said server system, tracking information associated with said parcel.

According to yet another embodiment of the invention, a method for arranging for the shipment of a parcel using a remote device connected to a server system over a communications network is provided. The method includes accessing said server system with said remote device and providing shipping information to said server system. The method also includes choosing one of a plurality of common carriers to ship said parcel. The method further includes generating, with said server system, a tracking number associated with said parcel for tracking said parcel, and providing said remote device with said tracking number.

Benefits of embodiments of the present invention include providing shippers with a standardized interface for shipping parcels using any of a plurality of common carriers. Other benefits of embodiments include permitting a shipper, using the internet, to arrange for shipping with a common carrier that does not itself have internet-arranged shipping capability. Still other benefits of other embodiments include facilitating comparisons of the costs and services of a plurality of common carriers by listing the costs of shipping a parcel using the various common carriers as well as the services offered by each common carrier.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order to more fully understand the present invention, reference is made to the accompanying drawings. Understanding that these drawings are not to be

considered limitations in the scope of the invention, the presently described embodiments and the presently understood best mode of the invention are described with additional detail through use of the accompanying drawings in which:

5 Fig. 1A is a simplified block diagram illustrating an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 1B is a simplified block diagram of a remote device illustrating an embodiment of the present invention;

Figs. 2A and 2B are a simplified flow diagram illustrating a method of shipping a parcel according to an embodiment of the present invention;

10 Fig. 3 is an illustration of an exemplary registration web page;

Fig. 4 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for providing shipping information;

Fig. 5 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for providing shipping information;

15 Fig. 6 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for providing shipping information;

Fig. 7 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for selecting a common carrier and a service of the selected common carrier;

20 Fig. 8 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for providing shipping information;

Fig. 9 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for providing shipping information;

Fig. 10 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for providing payment information;

25 Fig. 11 is an illustration of an exemplary final confirmation web page;

Fig. 12 is an illustration of an exemplary printable form;

Fig. 13 is a simplified flow diagram illustrating a method of tracking a parcel according to an embodiment of the present invention;

30 Fig. 14 is a simplified flow diagram illustrating a method of tracking a parcel according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 15 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for submitting a tracking number;

Fig. 16 is an illustration of an exemplary web page for providing status information of a shipment.

## DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

Fig. 1A is a simplified block diagram illustrating an embodiment of the present invention. This diagram is merely an example which should not limit the scope of the claims herein. One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize many other variations, modifications, and alternatives. As shown, the system 100 includes a shipping service server system 102 connected via a network connection 104 to a communications network 106. The shipping service server system 102 is preferably a server system suitable for maintaining an e-commerce-type website, and is coupled with a database system 105 such as, for example, systems available from Oracle, Sybase, Informix, or the like. The communications network 106 may be the Internet, an internet, a wide area network, an intranet, or any other communications network known to those skilled in the art. The network connection 104 is preferably a high-speed connection such as, for example, a T1 or T3 connection, or any other high speed data connection suitable for maintaining a website known to those skilled in the art.

Additionally, the system 100 may include remote devices such as a shipper computer 108, an agent computer 110 and a tracking computer 112, coupled with the communications network via network connections 114, 116, and 118, respectively. Each of the remote devices 108, 110, and 112 may be any one of various devices including, for example, a desktop computer, a laptop computer, a personal digital assistant, a cellular phone, a pager, and a workstation. Each of the remote devices may include a display device and a printer, and may include user input devices such as, for example, a keyboard, a mouse, a trackball, a touch screen, a barcode scanner, a light pen, and a microphone. Each of the network connections 114, 116, and 118 may be any of various connections suitable for communicating via the internet, including, for example, a telephone line, an ISDN connection, a DSL connection, a cable connection, a T1 connection, a cellular connection, a pager connection, other wireless connections, and any other suitable network connection known to those skilled in the art.

The system 100 may also include a common carrier server system 120 connected via a network connection 122 to the communications network 106. The common carrier server system 120 may be of a type similar to the shipping service server system 102, and the connection 122 may be of a type similar to the connection 104.

In another embodiment, the system 100 may include communications network 124, separate from communications network 106, for communication between

the agent computer 110 and the shipping service server system 102. In yet another embodiment, the system 100 may include communications network 126, separate from communications network 106, for communication between the agent computer 110 and the common carrier server system 120. Communications networks 124 and 126 may be 5 of a type similar to communications network 106, and the corresponding network connections for the agent computer 110 and the server systems may be of a type similar to network connections 116 and 104, respectively. Although communications networks 106, 124, and 126 are each illustrated as a single entity, it should be understood that networks 106, 124, and 126 each may actually be a network of individual computers and 10 servers.

In a specific embodiment, the shipping service server system 102 is configured to maintain an interactive website of a shipping service company, and the communications network 106 comprises the Internet. The shipper computer 108 includes web browsing software operating thereon for accessing, viewing, and interacting with 15 web pages via the internet. The web browsing software typically provides a graphical user interface allowing users to easily interact with data available on computers on the communications network 106, such as the shipping service server system. For example, the web browsing software allows a user to view web pages from the server system 102, enables the user to submit forms, and other data to the server system 102 and the like. 20 Many other operations are provided by browser software and are known to one of ordinary skill in the art. The shipper computer 108 may be located in a location making it conveniently accessible to a person wishing to ship a parcel. For example, the shipper computer may be located at a residence, a place of business, a public space, in a vehicle, etc. Also, as previously discussed, the shipper computer 108 may be a portable device. 25 In certain embodiments, a person wishing to ship a parcel (the shipper) may arrange for the shipment by accessing and interacting with the website maintained by the shipping service server system 102 using the shipper computer 108.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the agent computer 110 may also include web browsing software for accessing, viewing, and interacting with the 30 shipping service company interactive website via the internet. In another embodiment, the system 100 includes communications network 124, and the agent computer 110 and the server system 102 include software for communicating with each other via the communications network 124. Similarly, in an embodiment of the present invention, the agent computer 110 may include web browsing software for accessing, viewing, and

interacting with the common carrier server system 120 via the Internet 106. In another embodiment, the system 100 may include communications network 126, and the agent computer 110 and the common carrier server system 120 include software for communicating with each other via the communications network 126.

5           In yet another aspect of the present invention, the tracking computer 112 also includes web browsing software for accessing, viewing, and interacting with web pages via the internet. A person wishing to obtain information regarding the status of a shipment arranged via the shipping service server system 102 may obtain such information by accessing and interacting with the shipping service website using the  
10 tracking computer 112. Similar to the shipping computer 108, the tracking computer 112 may be located so as to be conveniently accessible by a person seeking to obtain shipment status information. The shipper computer 108 and the tracking computer 112 may be one in the same, or may be two separate devices.

15           Fig. 1B is a block diagram of a typical remote device 140 according to an embodiment of the present invention. Remote device 140 typically includes a monitor 141, a computer 143, a keyboard 145, a graphical input device 147, and a network interface 149. Remote device 140 may also include a data input device 148. Computer 143 includes typical computer components such as a processor 151, memory storage devices such as random access memory (RAM) 153 and disk drive 155, and a system bus 20 157 interconnecting the above components.

25           Graphical input device 147 is typically embodied as a computer mouse, a track pad, a trackball, a touch screen, and the like. Graphical input device 147 typically allows the user to graphically select objects, icons, buttons, text and the like output on the monitor 141 as illustrated in the examples below. Data input device 148 is typically embodied as a barcode scanner, light pen, or the like, and allows the user to quickly input to the computer 143 from a parcel, label, form, etc., data in the form of text, barcode, or the like.

30           RAM 153 and disk drive 155 are examples of tangible media for storage of data, files, computer programs, web browsing software, and the like. Other types of tangible media include floppy disks, removable hard disks, optical storage media such as CD-ROMS and bar codes, semiconductor memories such as flash memories, read-only memories (ROMS), battery-backed volatile memories, and the like. In embodiments of the present invention such as set top boxes, cellular phones, personal digital assistants,

two-way pagers, mass storage, such as disk drive 155, and the like may be dispensed with.

5 Web browsing software is typically embodied as Netscape Navigator 4.5, Microsoft's Internet Explorer 4.0, or the like. Other types of web browsing software may also be used, for example, in embodiments of the present invention such as set top boxes, cellular phones, personal digital assistants, two-way pagers, and the like.

10 Fig. 1B is representative of but one type of system for embodying the present invention. It will be readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art that many other hardware and software configurations are suitable for use with the present invention. Set top boxes, such as those provided by WebTV Networks, Inc., and the like, may also be used in embodiments of the present invention. Also, cellular phones, pagers, personal digital assistants, and the like having network connectivity and having web browsing software may be used in embodiments of the present invention.

15 Figs. 2A and 2B are a simplified flow diagram illustrating a method of shipping a parcel according to an embodiment of the present invention. This diagram is merely an illustration which should not limit the scope of the claims herein. One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize many other variations, modifications, and alternatives.

20 In a step 201, the shipper computer 108 is initially coupled to the Internet 106, web browsing software is run, and the shipper computer 108 is coupled to the website of the shipping service server system 102. The web browsing software may be run before or after the shipper computer 108 is initially coupled to the Internet. The shipper computer 108 is typically coupled to the server system 102 website by typing-in the name or a portion of the name of the website in an address box of the web browsing 25 software. The shipper may also directly type-in the IP address of the server system 102. Also, if the user had previously bookmarked the server system 102 website, the user may select the bookmark from a list of bookmarks. In yet another embodiment, the user may select a link to the server system 102 website that is located on a third party web page. For example, the third party web page may be a result screen from a web search engine, a 30 page with an advertisement banner and a link to the server system 102, a web page of a strategic partner, and the like.

In a step 202, the server system 102 is provided with shipping information. In an embodiment, the server system 102 maintains at least one interactive web page for providing it with shipping information. Using the shipper computer 108, a shipper may

enter the shipping information into the interactive web page using a keyboard and web browsing software. Then, the entered shipping information is transferred to the server system 102 in a manner known to those skilled in the art. The shipping information may include address information such as an origination address and ZIP code, a destination address and ZIP code, a sender name, and a recipient name. Additionally, the shipping information may include parcel information such as an estimated weight of the parcel, a declared value of the parcel, a description of the parcel, whether the parcel is fragile, whether the parcel is a letter or a package, whether the parcel is oversized, and, if the parcel is oversized, dimensions of the parcel. Also, the shipping information may include information regarding a desired class of service. In a specific embodiment, the desired class of service may be specified as either a rush delivery or a regular delivery. However, classes of services need not be limited to a choice between rush and regular delivery, but may be categorized in any of numerous ways known to those skilled in the art. In the specific embodiment, a regular delivery is delivery within 3 to 7 business days, and a rush delivery is delivery within 1 or 2 business days. As known to those skilled in the art, the definitions of rush and regular delivery need not be limited to those of the specific embodiment.

After having received at least some of the shipping information, a list of common carriers for shipping the parcel is compiled in a step 204. In an embodiment, the list of common carriers for shipping is compiled after receiving at least the information required for determining a shipping rate of at least one common carrier. In a specific embodiment, the list of common carriers for shipping is compiled after receiving the origination ZIP code, the destination ZIP code, the estimated weight of the parcel, whether the destination is a residence or a business, a declared value of the parcel, a description of the parcel, whether the parcel is oversized and, if oversized, its dimensions, whether the parcel is fragile, and whether the shipment is a rush or regular delivery. In a preferred embodiment, if a particular common carrier will not perform the shipping service (for example, it does not provide service to areas that include the origination and/or destination, it does not ship oversized packages, etc.), that common carrier is not included in the list. In another embodiment, if a particular common carrier offers a plurality of services that fall within the desired class of service, the list of common carriers may include, for the particular common carrier, the plurality of services offered. For example, if the desired class of service is a rush delivery (i.e. in a specific embodiment, 1 or 2 days) and if a particular common carrier offers an overnight delivery

service and a 2-day delivery service, the list of common carriers may include for the particular common carrier the overnight service and the 2-day service. In an alternative embodiment, the list of common carriers may be compiled without reference to a desired class of service, and may include every delivery service offered by each common carrier.

5     In this alternative embodiment, a desired class of service need not be specified prior to compiling the list of common carriers. In a specific embodiment, the list of common carriers may include shipping rates for each listed service offered by each listed common carrier, in order to assist the shipper in comparing costs of the common carriers. The shipping rates may include a fee assessed by the shipping service company.

10           In one embodiment, the server system 102 may obtain common carriers and respective shipping costs from the database system 105. The shipping costs may include service fees of the service company. The database system 105 may, for example, maintain shipment costs of the plurality of common carriers for various parcel types, parcel weights, parcel dimensions, classes of service, and according to origination and

15           destination locations. In another embodiment, if a common carrier provides access to its shipping services and costs over the Internet, the server system 102 may obtain the common carrier shipping costs from that common carrier by querying, via the Internet, a server system operated by that common carrier.

          After having compiled a list of common carriers in step 204, the server system 102 selects one of the listed common carriers to ship the parcel in a step 206. In one embodiment, a common carrier is selected by transferring, via the internet, the list from the server system 102 to the shipper computer 108, selecting, at the shipper computer 108, a common carrier for shipping the parcel, and transferring, via the Internet, the selection from the shipper computer 108 to the server system 102. In a specific

25           embodiment, the server system 102 creates a common carrier selection web page including the list of common carriers and transfers the common carrier selection web page to the shipper computer 108. The common carrier selection web page preferably includes shipping costs for each common carrier in order to facilitate a cost comparison of the various common carriers. Additionally, the common carrier selection web page may

30           include multiple shipping services, and their associated costs, for one or more of the common carriers.

          In the specific embodiment, a shipper, using the shipper computer 108, then selects one of the common carriers from the list using, for example, a mouse and web browsing software. In an embodiment, the user selects a common carrier by clicking

on a name or icon of a desired common carrier appearing on the common carrier selection web page. If the common carrier selection web page includes for a particular common carrier a plurality of services, the user selects a common carrier and a particular service of the common carrier by clicking on a name or icon of the particular service associated with the desired common carrier. In a manner known to those skilled in the art, the selected common carrier and, if also selected, the particular service, are then transmitted to the server system 102.

In another embodiment, a common carrier and a particular service of the common carrier are selected directly by the server system 102 in any number of ways. For example, the server system 102 may select a common carrier and associated service with a lowest shipping cost. Also, the server system 102 may select a common carrier based upon a preferred common carrier of the shipper, and select a service based upon a preferred service of the shipper. Additionally, any combination of these and other methods known to those skilled in the art may also be used to select a common carrier to ship the parcel. In a specific embodiment, the server system 102 transmits to the shipper computer 108 a web page indicating the chosen common carrier and associated service, and providing the shipper with an option to accept the chosen common carrier and associate service, or to select another common carrier and/or service. If the shipper elects to change the selection, the server system 102 would then transmit the compiled list of common carriers to the shipper computer 108 and allow the shipper to select a common carrier and service as already discussed.

Next, in a step 208, the server system 102 is provided with payment information for the shipment. In one embodiment, the shipper may be given an option to open an account with the shipping service company. The account may be established using any of numerous methods known to those skilled in the art. For example, a web page account-opening form may be transferred to the shipper computer 108 prompting the shipper to complete the account-opening form. Upon receiving a completed account-opening form, the server system 102 creates a new account with a corresponding account number. The server system 102 may provide the shipper the account number and a secure password, or the shipper may specify a password. After creating an account, the shipper may log into the shipping service website using the secure password, and have shipments billed to the account. The shipping service company may then bill the shipper at periodic intervals.

Additionally, the shipper may be given the option of paying for shipments on a shipment-by-shipment basis. For example, the shipper may arrange to have the shipment billed to a credit card by providing the server system 102 with a valid credit card number and additional verifying information, such as, for example, the credit card's 5 expiration date or the ZIP code of the credit card's billing address. Many other methods may be employed to arrange for payment on a shipment-by-shipment basis. For example, the shipment may similarly be paid for using a debit card or a smart card. Also, the shipper may be given the option of providing payment information at a later time such as, for example, when surrendering the parcel for shipment, or upon delivery of the parcel.

10 In a step 210, the server system 102 creates an electronic shipping file associated with the shipment. The shipping file may be stored in the database system 105, and may include information provided to the server system 102, such as shipping information provided in step 202, and the selected common carrier in step 206. Additionally, the shipping file may include payment information and information 15 regarding the shipment's status. The shipping file may be one file or a plurality of linked files. For example, a first file may include a link to a second file, and the second file may include shipping information. Also, the first file may include a link to a third file, and the third file may include status information. Additionally, the first file may include a link to a fourth file, and the fourth file may include payment information. One of ordinary skill 20 in the art would recognize many other variations, modifications, and alternatives of shipping file structures.

In a step 212, the server system 102 creates a tracking number associated with the shipment. The tracking number is independent of any common carrier-generated tracking number. In a step 214, the server system 102 stores the tracking number for the 25 shipment in the associated shipping file.

In a step 216, the server system 102 provides the tracking number to the shipper computer 108. The shipper may, as will be discussed below, use the tracking number to obtain, from the server system 102, information regarding the status of the shipment as the parcel is shipped from the origination to the destination. In an 30 embodiment, the server system 102 provides to the shipper computer 108 a form including the tracking number that the shipper may print using a printer attached to the shipper computer 108. The form may also include the tracking number in a barcode. Also, the server system 102 may provide to the shipper computer 108 a label, including the tracking number, that may be printed at the shipper computer and affixed to the

parcel. The label may similarly include the tracking number in a barcode. In another embodiment, the server system 102 may provide to the shipper computer 108 a label of the common carrier selected in step 206 that may be printed at a printer attached to the shipper computer 108 and affixed to the parcel. The common carrier label may include 5 an indication that the shipment was arranged through the shipping service company. The common carrier label may also include the tracking number generated by the server system 102.

Then, in a step 218, the shipper surrenders the parcel for shipment. The shipper may be provided with several options for surrendering the parcel. In an 10 embodiment, the shipper is given the option of bringing the parcel to an agent of the service company. Additionally, the shipper may be given the option of dropping off the parcel at a drop-off location. Parcels left at the drop-off locations may be periodically collected by an agent of the service company. Also, the shipper may be given the option of having the parcel picked up by an agent of the service company. In order to assist the 15 shipper, the server system 102 may provide to the shipper computer 108 locations of sites for surrendering the parcel, or phone numbers, fax numbers, emails or other information to enable summoning an agent to pick up the parcel known to those skilled in the art. The surrendered parcel should include the tracking number provided to the shipper in step 216. The tracking number may, for example, be hand written on the parcel. Additionally, 20 a form or label provided in step 216 may, for example, be attached to the parcel.

In another embodiment, the shipper is provided the option of surrendering the parcel directly to an agent of the common carrier selected in step 206. The server system 102 may provide to the shipper computer 108 locations of sites for surrendering the parcel, or phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mails or other information to enable 25 summoning an agent of the common carrier to pick up the parcel known to those skilled in the art. Also, the server system 102 may provide links to a website of the common carrier that provides information regarding surrendering parcels directly to the common carrier. The surrendered parcel should, as discussed above, include thereon the tracking number provided in step 216. Additionally, the parcel may include thereon an indication 30 that the shipment was arranged through the service company so as to notify the common carrier.

In a step 220, the information in the shipping file is reviewed, and updated or completed if needed using the agent computer 110. In one embodiment, the agent computer 110 is coupled to the server system 102 via the Internet 106, and couples to the

website of the server system 102 using web browsing software. In another embodiment, the agent computer 110 is coupled to the server system 102 via the communications network 124 using associated software. The tracking number may be entered into the agent computer 110 using, for example, a keyboard, a barcode scanner, a light pen, or the like. Then, the agent gains read/write access to the shipping file associated with the parcel using the tracking number and an authentication such as, for example, a password. In one embodiment, the server system 102 provides a web page form for entering and correcting shipping file information. The agent reviews the shipping file and may correct any incorrect shipping information such as, for example, the weight of the parcel.

5        Additionally, the agent may enter as yet unentered shipping information, or, if the shipper requests, may change the selected common carrier, service, or other shipping preferences. Additionally, if the shipper had elected, in step 208, to provide payment information upon surrender of the parcel, the agent may obtain payment information from the shipper. In 10      an embodiment, where the parcel was surrendered to an agent of the common carrier, the common carrier's agent may review, complete, and update the shipping file on the server system 102 as discussed above.

15     

In a step 222, a tracking number assigned to the parcel by the common carrier is obtained and stored in the shipping file created in step 210. The common carrier-assigned tracking number will assist the service company in obtaining tracking 20      information from the common carrier. In one embodiment, the common carrier-assigned tracking number is generated by the common carrier. An agent of either the service company or the common carrier may obtain a common carrier tracking number in any number of ways known to those skilled in the art. For example, if the chosen common carrier offers internet-arranged shipping, the agent may obtain a tracking number from a 25      common carrier server system 120 using the agent computer 110 connected with the internet 106. Additionally, the agent may obtain a tracking number using the agent computer 110 coupled with the common carrier server system 120 via the communications network 126. Also, the common carrier-assigned tracking number may be obtained from a common-carrier approved shipping label. In this embodiment, the 30      common carrier-assigned tracking number may be input to the agent computer 110 using, for example, a keyboard, a barcode scanner, a light pen, or the like. These are merely exemplary techniques for obtaining a common carrier-assigned tracking number. One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize many other variations, modifications, and

alternatives. In another embodiment, the common carrier may recognize the service company-assigned tracking number as its own.

The common carrier-assigned tracking number may be stored in the shipping file in a manner similar to step 220.

5           In a step 224, the parcel is prepared for shipping by the common carrier and, if not already, surrendered to the common carrier. Preparing the parcel may include affixing to the parcel labeling approved by the common carrier for shipment by the common carrier. The parcel may be prepared by a service company agent, a common carrier agent, or the shipper. Common carrier labels may be created and affixed to the 10 parcel in any number of ways known to those skilled in the art. As discussed with respect to step 216, the shipper may create a common carrier label using the shipper computer 108 and affix the common carrier label to the parcel. The shipper could then surrender the parcel to a service company agent or directly to an agent of the common carrier. In another embodiment, the agent may create a common carrier label using the agent 15 computer 110.

In a step 226, the service company and the common carrier that shipped the parcel bill for their services. In one embodiment, the service company bills the shipper for the cost of shipping the parcel, and the common carrier bills the service company for shipping the parcel. The service company's bill to the shipper may 20 reference the shipment by, for example, the service company-assigned tracking number, the common-carrier assigned tracking number, a date of the shipment, and other information to enable reconciliation. The common carrier's bill to the service company may reference the shipment by, for example, the service company-assigned tracking number, the common carrier-assigned tracking number, a manifest number, an account 25 number of the service company with the common carrier, a date of the shipment, and other information to enable reconciliation. In another embodiment, the service company bills the shipper for their service only, and the common carrier bills the shipper for the cost of the shipment. In this embodiment, the payment information submitted to the service company in step 208 may be forwarded, with prior approval from the shipper, to 30 the common carrier. In yet another embodiment, the common carrier bills the shipper for the cost of shipping, and the service company bills the common carrier for its services in arranging for the shipment. Other ways to bill for services and shipment known to those skilled in the art, including combinations of the above embodiments, may also be employed.

Figs. 3-11 illustrate exemplary web pages of an embodiment of the present invention for shipping parcels. In short, the service company website displays a series of forms that facilitate the transfer of all the necessary information from the shipper to the service company. In particular, each page has a "Next" button to direct the shipper to the next page in the sequence. In accordance with known practice, advancing to the next page is denied if any necessary information is missing.

For instance, Fig. 3 illustrates a registration web page permitting a shipper to register with the service company. Figs. 4-6 illustrate web pages for providing the server system 102 with shipping information. Fig. 7, illustrates a web page for selecting a particular service of a particular common carrier for shipping the parcel and for selecting a location to surrender the parcel. Figs. 8-9 illustrate web pages for providing the server system 102 with additional shipping information required for shipping the parcel. Fig. 10 illustrates a web page for providing the server system 102 with payment information. Fig. 11 illustrates a web page for providing the server system 102 with a final confirmation of the shipment.

Referring to Fig. 3, upon accessing the website of the service company, a shipper may elect to register with the service company. In order to register, the shipper provides a name, address, and other contact information, as well as payment information. When registering, the shipper chooses, or is provided with, a login name and a password. Registering allows the shipper to input address and payment information once initially, and avoid having to input such information each time the shipper wishes to ship a package using the service company's website. Upon visiting the service company's website in the future, the shipper may login using the login name and password, and the server system 102 will ascribe the registered address and payment information to the shipper. This would be effected by the shipper selecting the "Login" button at the top of the screen and getting a login screen (not shown).

Figs. 4-6, illustrate exemplary web pages for providing to the server system 102 shipping information, corresponding to step 202 illustrated in Fig. 2. In particular, Fig. 4 illustrates a web page for providing address information, parcel information, and class of service information. A shipper may provide address information in designated sections A and C. In section A, the shipper provides the origination and destination ZIP codes. In section C, the shipper specifies whether the destination address is a business or residential address. The remaining address information required for shipping the parcel is provided using another web page that will

be discussed shortly. In designated section B, an estimate of the parcel's weight may be provided. In a specific embodiment, an estimated weight is specified by selecting a choice from a pull-down menu. In the specific embodiment, the choices in the pull-down menu include "letter" or weights in one pound increments. In designated section D, the 5 shipper chooses a desired class of service between two choices: regular or rush.

Fig. 5 illustrates a web page for providing additional shipping information. In designated section E, the shipper specifies a value of the parcel. In designated section F, the shipper specifies a description of the parcel. In a specific embodiment, the shipper may select a description from a pull-down menu that includes choices such as 10 "electronics," "glass items," "photographs," "software," and "other." In designated section G, the shipper specifies whether the parcel is oversized. In designated section H, the shipper specifies whether the parcel is fragile. In designated section I, the shipper may create reference text to be associated with the parcel. Fig. 6 illustrates a web page for providing further additional shipping information. In particular, the web page 15 illustrated in Fig. 6 permits a shipper to provide the server system 102 with the dimensions of an oversized package.

Fig. 7 illustrates a web page for permitting a shipper to select a common carrier and a particular service for shipping the parcel, corresponding to step 206 in Fig. 2. In designated section B, the web page lists a plurality of common carriers for shipping 20 the parcel. Additionally, corresponding to each common carrier, the web page lists a plurality of services offered by the common carrier that fall within the desired class of service specified by the shipper using the web page illustrated in Fig. 4. Also, the web page lists the price of each of the services offered by each of the common carriers. A shipper selects a particular service of a particular common carrier by, for example, 25 clicking with a mouse on a "select" icon associated with the particular service.

Designated section A of the web page lists one or more locations at which the shipper may drop-off the parcel to an agent of the service company. The web page may provide links to other web pages that provide additional information about the listed drop-off locations, such as, for example, hours of operation and driving directions. The 30 web page illustrated in Fig. 7 permits a shipper to select a particular drop-off location from the list in section A by clicking on the particular drop-off location.

After selecting a service and drop-off location, the shipper proceeds to the web page illustrated in Fig. 8. This web page permits the shipper to provide to the server system 102 additional shipping information corresponding to the step 102 illustrated in

Fig. 2. In particular, the web page of Fig. 8 permits the shipper to provide a recipient name, and a destination address. Other information also may be provided, including, for example, a recipient attention, a recipient phone number, a recipient fax number, and a recipient email address.

5 After specifying at least the recipient address information required for shipping the parcel, the shipper proceeds to the web page illustrated in Fig. 9. This web page permits the shipper to provide to the server system 102 more shipping information corresponding to the step 202 illustrated in Fig. 2. In particular, the web page allows the specification of a sender name, an origination address, and contact information. If the  
10 shipper has previously registered with the service company's website, and has logged in, the server system 102 may include in this web page information specified in the registration form illustrated in Fig. 3. This assists a registered shipper by alleviating the burden of entering this information each time the shipper wishes to ship a parcel using the service company. Additionally, it permits the shipper to specify different sender and  
15 origination information if needed.

Next, the shipper proceeds to the web page illustrated in Fig. 10, which permits the shipper to specify payment information, corresponding to the step 208 illustrated in Fig. 2. Similar to web page of Fig. 9, the server system 102 may include information previously specified by a registered shipper.

20 After providing to the server system 102 the shipping information and payment information corresponding to the steps 202 and 208, respectively, and after selecting a common carrier and service corresponding to step 206, the server system 102 transmits to the shipping computer 108 a confirmation web page as illustrated in Fig. 11. The confirmation web page permits a shipper to review the information and choice of  
25 carrier provided to the server system 102. At this point, if the shipper chooses, the shipper may change any information or select another common carrier and/or service. Otherwise, the shipper may finally submit the information to the server system 102 by, for example, clicking on the "submit" button.

Then, in a step corresponding to step 216 of Fig. 2, the server system 102  
30 provides to the shipper computer 108 a printable form, as illustrated in Fig. 12, that includes the tracking number generated in step 212 of Fig. 2. Upon surrendering the parcel to an agent of the service company, the form illustrated in Fig. 12 may be affixed to the parcel or provided to the agent. On the exemplary form illustrated in Fig. 12, the tracking number 301 is additionally provided in bar code form 303.

The present invention also provides a method and system for tracking a parcel shipped using any one of a plurality of common carriers. Embodiments of the present invention are illustrated in Figs. 13-14.

Fig. 13 is a simplified flow diagram illustrating a method of tracking a 5 parcel according to an embodiment of the present invention. This diagram is merely an illustration which should not limit the scope of the claims herein. One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize many other variations, modifications, and alternatives.

Referring again to Fig. 2, a tracking number for tracking a shipment is provided to the shipper in step 216. The shipper may use this tracking number to track 10 the shipment of the parcel according to the embodiment of the present invention illustrated in Fig. 13. In a step 250, shipment status information stored in the shipping file may be updated several times during the course of the shipment. In one embodiment, the server system 102 periodically updates the status of the shipment by periodically retrieving status information from the common carrier using a common carrier-assigned 15 tracking number stored in the shipping file as discussed with respect to step 222 of Fig. 2. Shipment status information may be obtained from the common carrier in any number of ways known to those skilled in the art. For example, the server system 102 may query a tracking website operated by a common carrier server system 120 using the common carrier-assigned tracking number. Additionally, if the common carrier permits obtaining 20 shipment status with a shipper-assigned reference number, the service company may, for example, assign the service company's tracking number as the reference number, and obtain status information from the common carrier server system 120 using the service company's tracking number. Also, the service company may arrange with a common carrier for the common carrier to adopt or recognize the service company's tracking 25 number system.

In another embodiment, updated status information is sent by the common carrier to the server system 102 periodically, upon a change in status, or a combination of the two. Such change in status information may be sent from a common carrier server system 120 to the service company server system 102 via the internet 106 in a manner 30 known to those skilled in the art.

Referring to Figs. 1 and 13, in a step 252, a tracking number of a package is provided to the server system 102 using the tracking computer 120. In an embodiment, the server system 102 maintains at least one interactive web page for providing it with a tracking number for tracking a shipment. Using the tracking computer 120, a user may

enter a tracking number into the interactive web page using, for example, a keyboard or barcode scanner and web browsing software. Then, the entered tracking number is transferred to the server system 102 in a manner known to those skilled in the art.

Upon receiving the tracking number the server system 102, in a step 254, 5 accesses the shipping file associated with the tracking number and retrieves the status information of the shipment. Finally, in a step 256, the server system 102 transfers the status information to the tracking computer 120. In one embodiment, the server system 102 transfers the status information to the tracking computer 120 in a web page for viewing on the tracking computer 120 using web browsing software.

10 In another embodiment, the status information in the shipping file may include an associated age. If upon accessing the shipping file the age of the status information is older than a specified amount, the server system 102 may then obtain updated status information from the common carrier in a manner already discussed or known to those skilled in the art.

15 Fig. 14 is a simplified flow diagram illustrating a method of tracking a parcel according to another embodiment of the present invention. This diagram is merely an illustration which should not limit the scope of the claims herein. One of ordinary skill in the art would recognize many other variations, modifications, and alternatives.

In a step 260, a tracking number of a package is provided to the server 20 system 102 using the tracking computer 120, in manner similar to the step 252 as discussed with reference to Fig. 3. Then, in a step 262, the server system 102 accesses the shipping file associated with the tracking number received in step 260 and obtains from the shipping file a common carrier-assigned tracking number. Next, in a step 264, the common carrier-assigned tracking number is used to obtain status information from 25 the common carrier in a manner similar to the step 250 as discussed with reference to Fig. 3. Finally, in a step 266, the server system 102 transfers the status information to the tracking computer 120 in a manner similar to step 256.

Figs. 15 and 16 illustrate exemplary web pages of an embodiment of the 30 present invention for tracking parcels. For instance, Fig. 15 illustrates a web page for submitting a tracking number. This web page illustrates that status information of a package may be obtained without knowledge of the particular common carrier that shipped the parcel. Fig. 16 illustrates a web page that provides status information of a shipment. As illustrated, in Fig. 16, the provided status information may include origination address information, destination address information, parcel information, a

location of where the parcel was dropped off for shipment, the selected common carrier, the selected service of common carrier, and the price of the shipment. Additionally, the provided information may include a date and time of surrender to the common carrier (not shown), a last known location of the parcel (not shown), an approximate current location 5 of the parcel (not shown), whether the parcel was delivered (not shown), if delivered, a date and time of delivery (not shown), if delivered and signed for, an identity of the person who signed for the parcel (not shown), and any other information useful in ascertaining the status of the shipment.

10 The block diagrams of the architecture and flow charts are grouped for ease of understanding. However, it should be understood that combinations of blocks, splitting of blocks, additions of new blocks, re-arrangement of blocks, and the like are contemplated in alternative embodiments of the present invention.

15 The invention has now been explained with reference to specific embodiments. Other embodiments will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Therefore it is not intended that this invention be limited except as indicated by the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1                   1. A method in a server system for facilitating a shipment of a parcel  
2 using any one of a plurality of common carriers, comprising:  
3                   receiving shipping information from a remote device connected, over a  
4 communications network, to said server system;  
5                   selecting one of said plurality of common carriers to ship said parcel;  
6                   creating a tracking number associated with said shipment;  
7                   providing to said remote device said tracking number.
- 1                   2. The method of claim 1 further comprising creating a shipping file  
2 associated with said shipment.
- 1                   3. The method of claim 1 wherein said selecting step comprises providing  
2 to said remote device a list of common carriers, and receiving from said remote device a  
3 selected common carrier.
- 1                   4. The method of claim 3 wherein said list includes a cost of shipment for  
2 each listed common carrier.
- 1                   5. The method of claim 3 wherein said list includes a plurality of services  
2 for at least one common carrier.
- 1                   6. The method of claim 1 wherein said received shipping information  
2 includes origination address information.
- 1                   7. The method of claim 2 further comprising storing in said shipping file  
2 said selected common carrier.
- 1                   8. The method of claim 2 further comprising receiving a common carrier-  
2 assigned tracking number.
- 1                   9. The method of claim 8 further comprising storing said common carrier-  
2 assigned tracking number in said shipping file.
- 1                   10. The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving payment  
2 information.

1                   11. The method of claim 1 further comprising providing to said remote  
2 device options for surrendering said parcel.

1                   12. A method in a remote device for arranging for the shipment of a  
2 parcel, comprising:

3                   accessing a server system connected, over a communications network, to  
4 said remote device;  
5                   providing shipping information to said server system;  
6                   receiving from said server system a list of common carriers for shipping  
7 said parcel;  
8                   selecting a common carrier from said list;  
9                   providing to said server system said selected common carrier; and  
10                  receiving, from said server system, a tracking number for obtaining, from  
11 said server system, tracking information associated with said parcel.

1                   13. The method of claim 12 wherein said list includes a cost of shipment  
2 for each listed common carrier..

1                   14. The method of claim 12 wherein said list includes a plurality of  
2 services for at least one common carrier.

1                   15. The method of claim 12 wherein said shipping information includes  
2 origination address information.

1                   16. The method of claim 12 further comprising providing to said server  
2 system payment information.

1                   17. The method of claim 12 further comprising receiving from said server  
2 system options for surrendering said parcel.

1                   18. A method for arranging for the shipment of a parcel using a remote  
2 device connected to a server system over a communications network, comprising:  
3                   accessing said server system with said remote device;  
4                   providing shipping information to said server system;  
5                   choosing one of a plurality of common carriers to ship said parcel;

6 generating, with said server system, a tracking number associated with said  
7 parcel for tracking said parcel; and  
8 providing said remote device with said tracking number.

1 19. A system for arranging for the shipment of a parcel, comprising:  
2 a remote device coupled to a communications network;  
3 a server system coupled to said communications network, said server  
4 system configured to:  
5 receive from said remote device shipping information associated with said  
6 parcel;  
7 provide to said remote device a list of common carriers for shipping said  
8 parcel;  
9 receive from said device a common carrier selected from said list for  
10 shipping said parcel; and  
11 create a tracking number associated with said parcel for tracking the  
12 shipment of said parcel.

1                   21. The system of claim 19 wherein said list of common carriers includes  
2                   shipment costs associated with each common carrier.

1                   22. The system of claim 19 wherein said list of common carriers includes  
2                   a plurality of services for at least one common carrier.

1                   23. The system of claim 19 wherein said shipping information includes  
2 origination address information.

1                           24. The system of claim 20 wherein said server system is further  
2 configured to store an indication of said selected common carrier in said shipping file.

1                   25. The system of claim 20 wherein said server system is further  
2                   configured to receive a common carrier-assigned tracking number.

1                           26. The system of claim 25 wherein said server system is further  
2 configured to store said common carrier-assigned tracking number in said shipping file.

1                   27. The system of claim 19 wherein said server system is further  
2                   configured to receive payment information associated with said shipment.

1                   28. A method in a server system for providing, to a remote device,  
2                   updated tracking information associated with a parcel shipped using a common carrier,  
3                   comprising:

4                   creating a tracking number associated with said parcel;  
5                   storing said tracking number in a shipping file;  
6                   storing an indication of said common carrier in said shipping file;  
7                   obtaining from a common carrier server system updated tracking  
8                   information associated with said parcel;  
9                   receiving from said remote device a request for updated tracking  
10                  information, said request including said tracking number; and  
11                  providing to said remote device said updated tracking information.

1                   29. The method of claim 28 further comprising:  
2                   upon receiving said request, accessing said shipping file with reference to  
3                   said tracking number; and  
4                   retrieving from said shipping file said indication of said common carrier.

1                   30. The method of claim 29 further comprising storing in said shipping  
2                  file a common carrier-assigned tracking number.

1                   31. The method of claim 30 wherein said updated tracking information is  
2                  obtained from said common carrier server system with reference to said common carrier-  
3                  assigned tracking number.

1                   32. The method of claim 28 wherein said updated tracking information is  
2                  obtained from said common carrier server system with reference to said tracking number.

1                   33. A system for obtaining tracking information associated with the  
2                  shipment of a parcel shipped using a common carrier, comprising:  
3                   a remote device coupled to a communications network;  
4                   a server system coupled to said communications network, said server  
5                  system configured to:

6 receive from said remote device a first tracking number associated with  
7 said parcel;  
8 obtain, from a shipping file associated with said first tracking number, a  
9 second tracking number;  
10 obtain, using said second tracking number, tracking information from said  
11 common carrier; and  
12 provide said tracking information to said remote device.

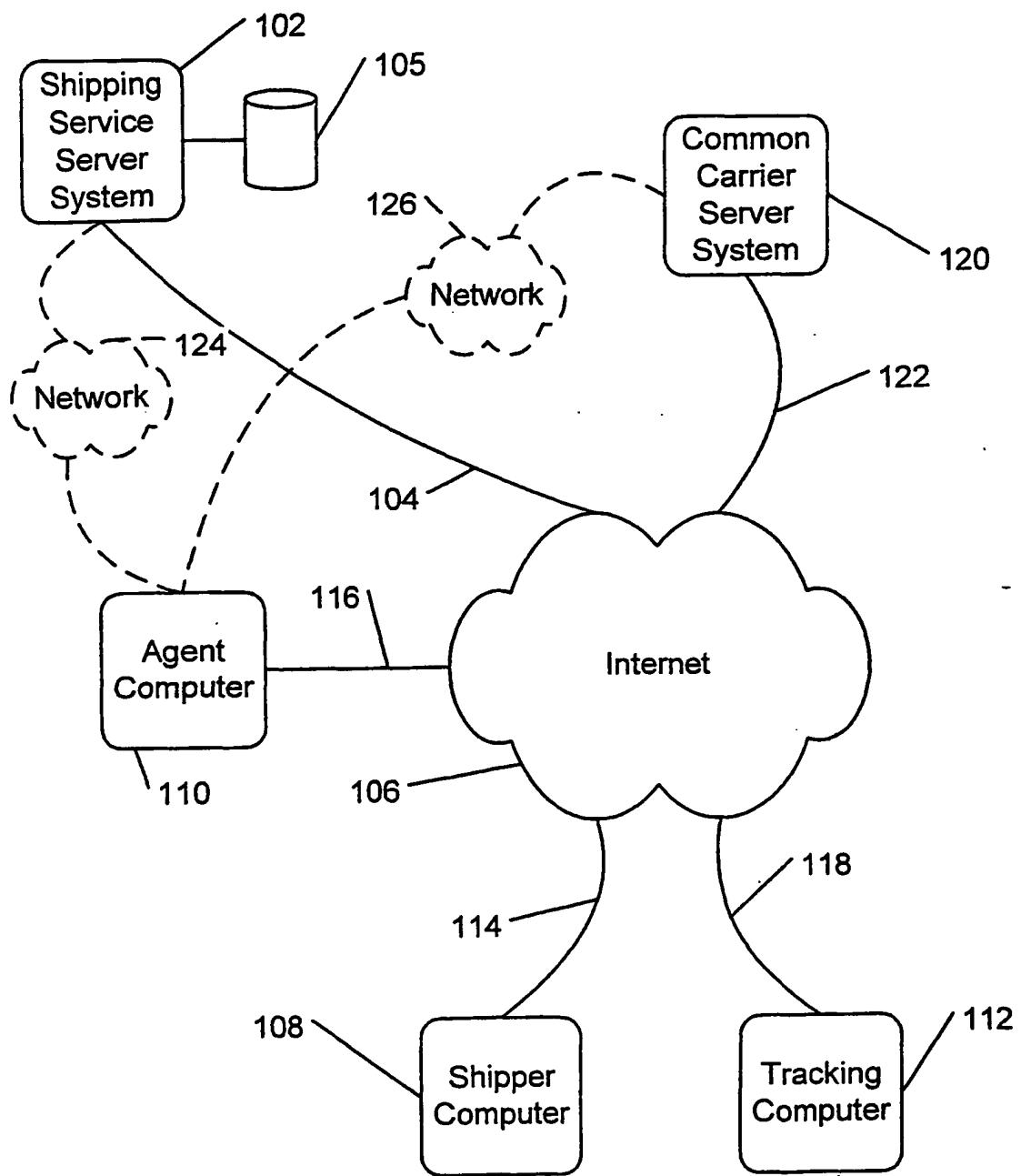


FIG. 1A.

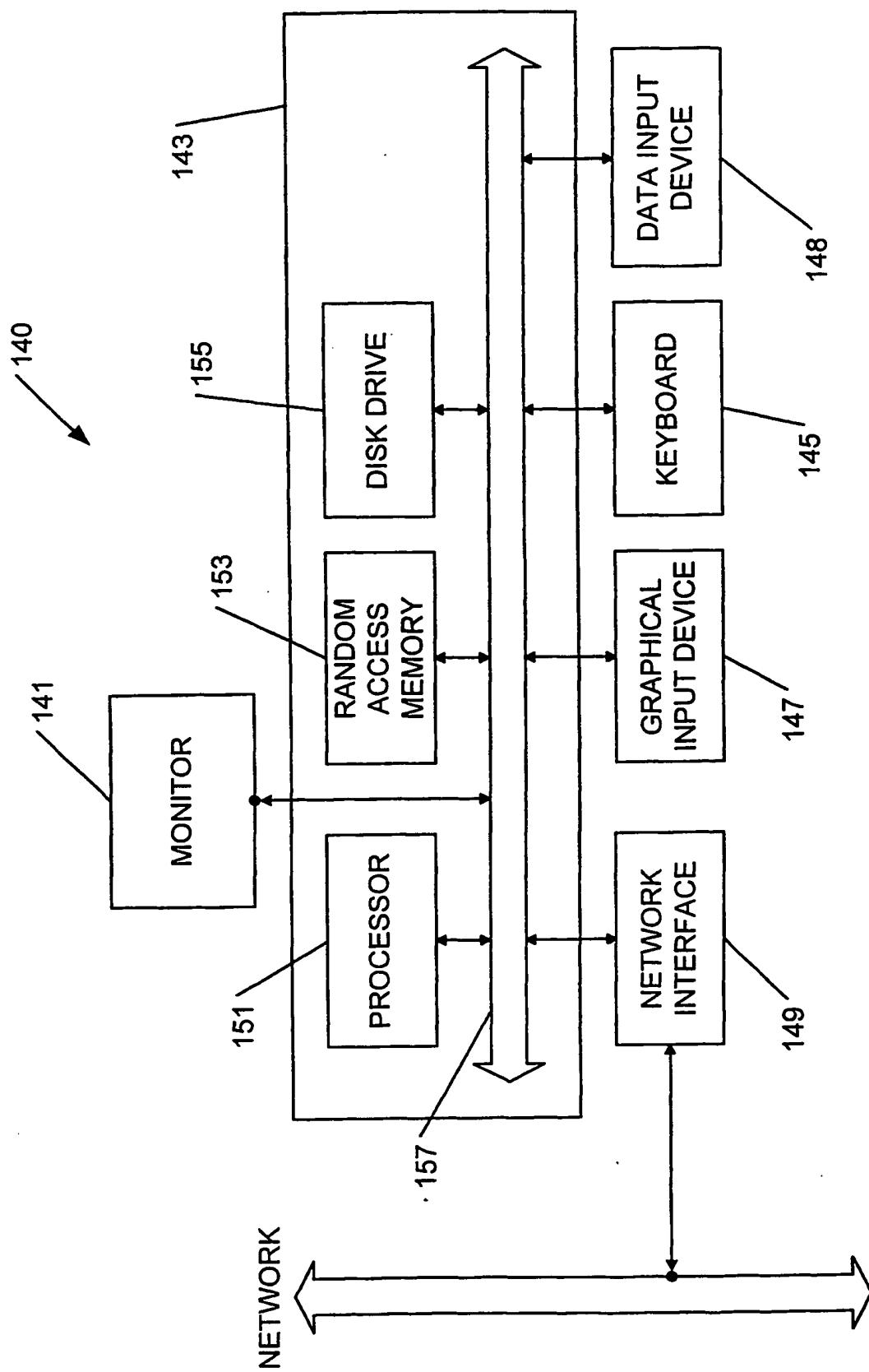


FIG. 1B:

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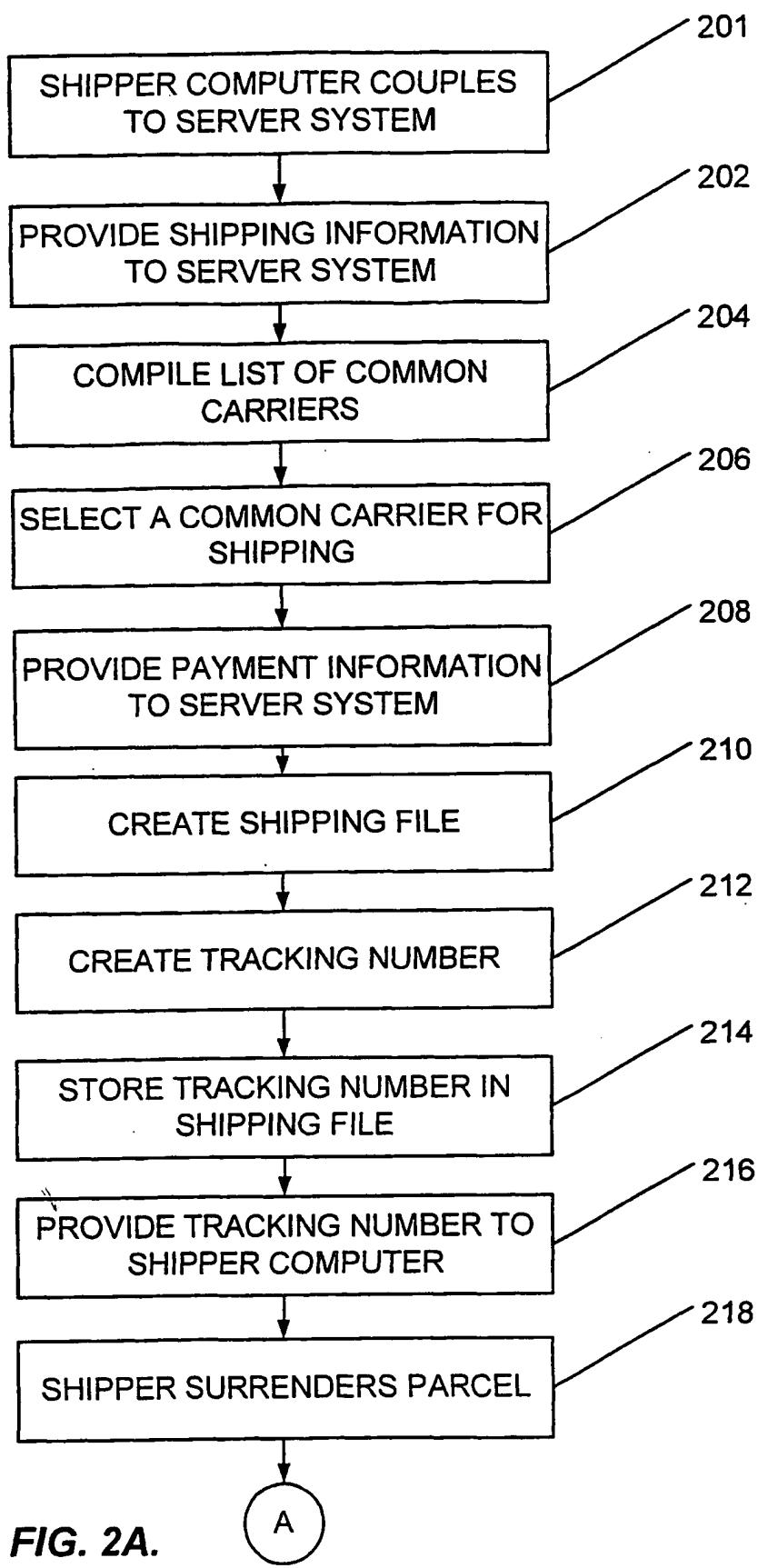
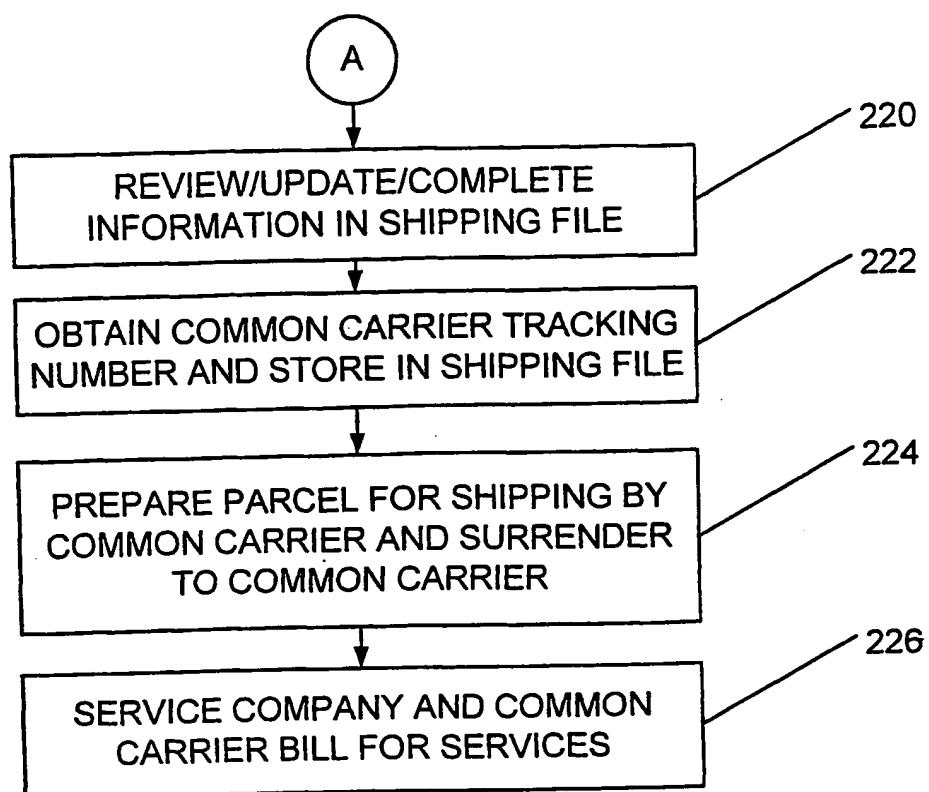


FIG. 2A.

A

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**FIG. 2B.**

Shipping	Tracking	Ship Locations	Service Guide	Help	Login	Register
Become a Registered User, It's Easy and Free!						
<b>PAYMENT INFORMATION</b>						
*Name/ Company	*Credit Card		*Account Number		*Expiration Date	
Attn:	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/> MM <input type="text"/> YYYY	
*Street Address 1	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Use residence address	
Street Address 2	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
Address 3	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
*City	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
*State (U.S.)	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
Country	<input type="text"/> USA		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
*Zip Code	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
*Phone Number	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
Fax Number	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
*Email (sender)	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
<input type="button" value="CLEAR"/> <input type="button" value="NEXT"/> <input type="button" value="CANCEL"/>						
<input type="checkbox"/> Required Information						

**FIG. 3.**

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PACKAGE DETAILS	
page 1	<b>(A) ENTER ZIP CODES</b>
2	Sending From: <input type="text"/>
3	Sending To: <input type="text"/>
4	<b>(B) ENTER WEIGHT</b>
5	Estimated Weight: <input type="text"/> ?
6	<b>(C) CHOOSE DESTINATION</b>
7	Destination: <input type="checkbox"/> Residential <input type="checkbox"/> Business (not at a residence)
	<b>(D) CHOOSE SERVICE</b>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regular <input type="checkbox"/> Rush (3-7 business days) (1 or 2 business days)
	<b>NEXT</b>

FIG. 4.

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[Shipping](#) [Tracking](#) [Ship Locations](#) [Service Guide](#) [Help](#) [Login](#) [Register](#)**PACKAGE DETAILS (continued)**

page

[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#)

<b>(E) ENTER VALUE</b>	?
Value of Package: <input type="text" value="Select"/>	
<b>(F) ENTER DESCRIPTION</b>	?
Package Description: <input type="text" value="Select"/>	
<b>(G) INDICATE PACKAGE SIZE</b>	?
Oversized? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
<b>(H) INDICATE BREAKABILITY</b>	
Fragile? <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
<b>(I) REFERENCE TEXT</b>	?
Reference Text: (e.g. "Mom's B-day") <input type="text"/>	

[NEXT](#) **FIG. 5.**

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[Shipping](#) [Tracking](#) [Ship Locations](#) [Service Guide](#) [Help](#) [Login](#) [Register](#)

**Is Your Package Oversize?**  
Read the description [here](#) to determine if your package may be oversize or odd shaped.

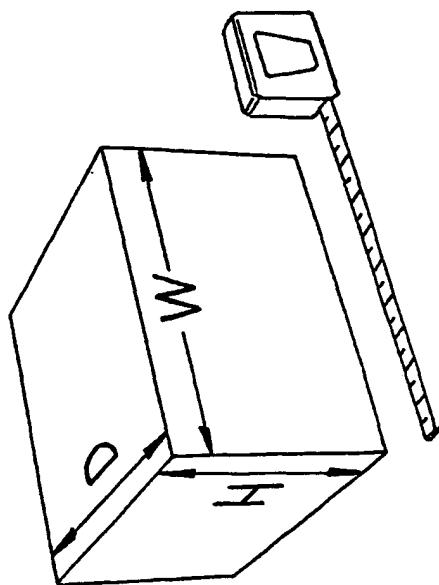
Enter the measurements of your package below, and press 'NEXT' to calculate shipping rates.

**Package dimensions:**

Length:  [Select](#) 

Width:  [Select](#) 

Depth:  [Select](#) 

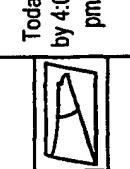
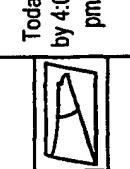
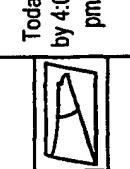
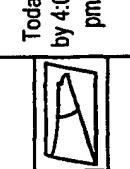
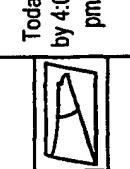
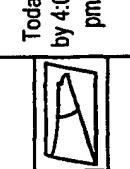


My package is not oversize, go [Back](#)

**NEXT** 

**FIG. 6.**

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<a href="#">Shipping</a> <a href="#">Tracking</a> <a href="#">Ship Locations</a> <a href="#">Service Guide</a> <a href="#">Help</a> <a href="#">Login</a> <a href="#">Register</a>																															
<b>RATE SELECTION</b>																															
<p><b>(A) SELECT DROP OFF</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">?</td> <td style="width: 90%;"> <p>Declared Value: \$300.00</p> <p><a href="#">location info</a> <a href="#">show rush rates</a></p> <p><a href="#">see covered rates</a></p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"> <b>(B) CHOOSE RATE</b> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"> <p>Drop off time at <b>PACKAGE NET</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">3 Day</td> <td style="width: 10%;">regular delivery</td> <td style="width: 10%;">3-7 Days</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: right;">Ground rate description UPS</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Today by 4:00 pm</td> <td>by 5:00p \$11.90</td> <td>by 5:00p \$5.90</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input checked="" type="radio"/> select         </td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input type="radio"/> select         </td> </tr> </table>   <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">3 Day</td> <td style="width: 10%;">regular delivery</td> <td style="width: 10%;">3-7 Days</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: right;">Ground rate description USPS</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Today by 4:00 pm</td> <td>by 5:00p \$6.50</td> <td>by 5:00p \$6.45</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input type="radio"/> select         </td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input checked="" type="radio"/> select         </td> </tr> </table> </td> </tr> </table>		?	<p>Declared Value: \$300.00</p> <p><a href="#">location info</a> <a href="#">show rush rates</a></p> <p><a href="#">see covered rates</a></p>	<b>(B) CHOOSE RATE</b>		<p>Drop off time at <b>PACKAGE NET</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">3 Day</td> <td style="width: 10%;">regular delivery</td> <td style="width: 10%;">3-7 Days</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: right;">Ground rate description UPS</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Today by 4:00 pm</td> <td>by 5:00p \$11.90</td> <td>by 5:00p \$5.90</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input checked="" type="radio"/> select         </td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input type="radio"/> select         </td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">3 Day</td> <td style="width: 10%;">regular delivery</td> <td style="width: 10%;">3-7 Days</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: right;">Ground rate description USPS</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Today by 4:00 pm</td> <td>by 5:00p \$6.50</td> <td>by 5:00p \$6.45</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input type="radio"/> select         </td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;"> <input checked="" type="radio"/> select         </td> </tr> </table>		3 Day	regular delivery	3-7 Days	Ground rate description UPS		Today by 4:00 pm	by 5:00p \$11.90	by 5:00p \$5.90	<input checked="" type="radio"/> select		<input type="radio"/> select		3 Day	regular delivery	3-7 Days	Ground rate description USPS		Today by 4:00 pm	by 5:00p \$6.50	by 5:00p \$6.45	<input type="radio"/> select		<input checked="" type="radio"/> select	
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<a href="#">page 1</a>	<a href="#">page 2</a>	<a href="#">page 3</a>	<a href="#">page 4</a>	<a href="#">page 5</a>	<a href="#">page 6</a>	<a href="#">page 7</a>																									

**FIG. 7.**

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Shipping   Tracking   Ship Locations   Service Guide   Help   Login   Register

## RECIPIENT ADDRESS

page  
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

## ENTER RECIPIENT INFORMATION

Please note: For APO or FPO addresses, please enter APO or FPO in the CITY field, choose the appropriate "AE" "AA" or "AP" code from the State list.

?

\*Name Company Attn: \*Street Address 1 Street Address 2 Street Address 3 \*City \*State (U.S.)  California  Country  USA  \*Zip Code Phone Number Fax Number Email (Recipient) \* Required information  Notify recipient

BACK

NEXT 

FIG. 8'

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Shipping   Tracking   Ship Locations   Service Guide   Help   Login   Register

## SENDER ADDRESS

## ENTER SENDER INFORMATION

page  
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Please note: For  
APO or FPO  
addresses,  
please enter  
APO or FPO  
in the CITY  
field, choose  
the appropriate  
"AE" "AA" or  
"AP" code  
from the  
State list.

?

\*Name Company Attn: \*Street Address 1 Street Address 2 Street Address 3 \*City 

\*State (U.S.)  Country  \*Zip Code

\*Phone Number Fax Number 

\*Email (Sender)   
\* Required information  Shipping notification  Delivery Notification

BACK



FIG. 9.

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Shipping	Tracking	Ship Locations	Service Guide	Help	Login	Register
<b>PAYMENT INFORMATION</b>						
<b>ENTER PAYMENT INFORMATION</b>						
?						
*Credit Card <input style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 10px;" type="button" value="Select"/> *Account Number <input type="text" value="4111111111111111"/>						
*Expiration Date <input type="text" value="01"/> <input style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 5px;" type="button" value="▼"/> <input type="text" value="2001"/> <input style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 5px;" type="button" value="▼"/>						
*Cardholder Name <input type="text" value="John Dough"/>						
<input type="checkbox"/> Use sender address as billing address						
*Billing Address <input type="text" value="5555 Cleveland Ave"/>						
Billing Address 2 <input type="text"/>						
Billing Address 3 <input type="text"/>						
*City <input type="text" value="Columbus"/> *State <input type="text" value="Ohio"/> <input style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px 5px;" type="button" value="▼"/>						
*Country <input type="text" value="United States"/> *Zip Code <input type="text" value="43231"/>						
<input type="checkbox"/> * Required information						
<input style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 10px;" type="button" value="NEXT"/>						
<input style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px 10px;" type="button" value="BACK"/>						
page <input type="text" value="1"/> <input type="text" value="2"/> <input type="text" value="3"/> <input type="text" value="4"/> <input type="text" value="5"/> <input type="text" value="6"/> <input type="text" value="7"/>						

NOTE:  
 Your  
 account  
 will not  
 be charged  
 until your  
 package  
 has  
 shipped.

All personal information is transmitted over a secure connection, and is used solely for this transaction. The padlock or key icon does not appear at the bottom of your browser due to the frames used on this site.

**FIG. 10.**

page FINAL CONFIRMATION[Shipping](#) [Tracking](#) [Ship Locations](#) [Service Guide](#) [Help](#) [Login](#) [Register](#)**CONFIRM PURCHASE**Description of  
Package: **Glass Items**Oversized:  **No**Fragile:  **No**Service Type:  **Regular**Package Value:  **\$300**Destination Type:  **Residential**Reference text:  **fjaife** **Notified: No**Recipient:  **Misty** **Notified: No**

308 Shadowfalls Circle, Martinez, California

Shipped via:  **UPS - Tues 2/8 - 5:00pm**Est. Weight:  **5 Lbs**Shipping Rate:  **\$ 11.90** (Based on est. weight)Coverage:  **Not Covered**Drop off location:  **Easter Food Store 536 - 1300 W Burlington St**Charge account:  **Visa**Your email:  **xxx@neopostlogistics.co**Notify Sender Upon: Shipment  **No**Delivery  **No**

NOTE: Your account will not be charged until your package, with a unique number, has shipped.

 **BACK** **CANCEL** **SUBMIT****FIG. 11.**

By clicking the 'SUBMIT' button, I agree to the terms as stated above.

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I have read and understand all the information above; and accept the terms of use for this site; I understand the shipping rate is based on the estimated package information I have provided; and may change. I authorize to charge my account a shipping rate based on the actual weight and dimensions of my package.

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NUMBER	
page	—Store Copy— —Store Copy— —Store Copy—
1	Package Description: Glass Items Reference text: fjeife Shipped via: UPS - Tues 2/8 - 5:00pm
2	Recipient: Misty Attention to: 308 Shadowfalls Cir
3	Shipped To: Martinez, CA 94553 United States
4	# 0000031201
5	Drop off location: Easter Food Store 536 - 1300 W Burlington St. Fairfield Store Number: 0100100100670
6	Shipped from: Bill Bailey 1300 W Burlington Ave Fairfield, IA 52556 United States
7	Price: \$11.90 (Based on <u>estimated weight</u> ; this may change) Card Type: Visa
301	
Shipping Barcode: 0000031201	
301	
303	

—Copy Below— —Detach Here— —Copy Below—	
Package Description: Glass Items Reference text: fjeife Shipped via: UPS - Tues 2/8 - 5:00pm	Drop off location: Easter Food Store 536 - 1300 W Burlington St. Fairfield Store Number: 0100100100670
Recipient: Misty Attention to: 308 Shadowfalls Cir	Shipped from: Bill Bailey 1300 W Burlington Ave Fairfield, IA 52556 United States
Shipped To: Martinez, CA 94553 United States	Price: \$11.90 (Based on <u>estimated weight</u> ; this may change) Card Type: Visa
# 0000031201	
301	—Customer Receipt Below— —Detach Here— —Customer Receipt Below—

**Print This Page and Keep For Your Records**

Write the number for this shipping clearly on your package.

Package Description: Glass Items Fragile? No Reference text: fjeife Shipped via: UPS - Tues 2/8 - 5:00pm Insurance: Not Covered Pkg Value: \$300	Drop off location: Easter Food Store 536 - 1300 W Burlington St. Fairfield
Recipient: Misty Destination Type: Residential Attention to: 308 Shadowfalls Cir	Shipped from: Bill Bailey 1300 W Burlington Ave Fairfield, IA 52556 United States
Shipped To: Martinez, CA 94553 United States	Notify Sender: Upon Shipment No Upon Delivery No
# 0000031201	Price: \$11.90 (Based on <u>estimated weight</u> ; this may change) Card Type: Visa

301

**REGISTER NOW**

**SHIP ANOTHER**

CUSTOMER NOTICE. Prices and delivery times are based on information provided to "Affiliate" at time of online processing. If actual package weight, value, size, contents and/or drop off time or location differs from information supplied online price and/or time in transit could vary significantly from online calculation. Packages will be verified at time of transaction, and new charges will be assessed if necessary. All price and time-in-transit information determined at the time of actual processing will supersede values calculated online.

**FIG. 12.**

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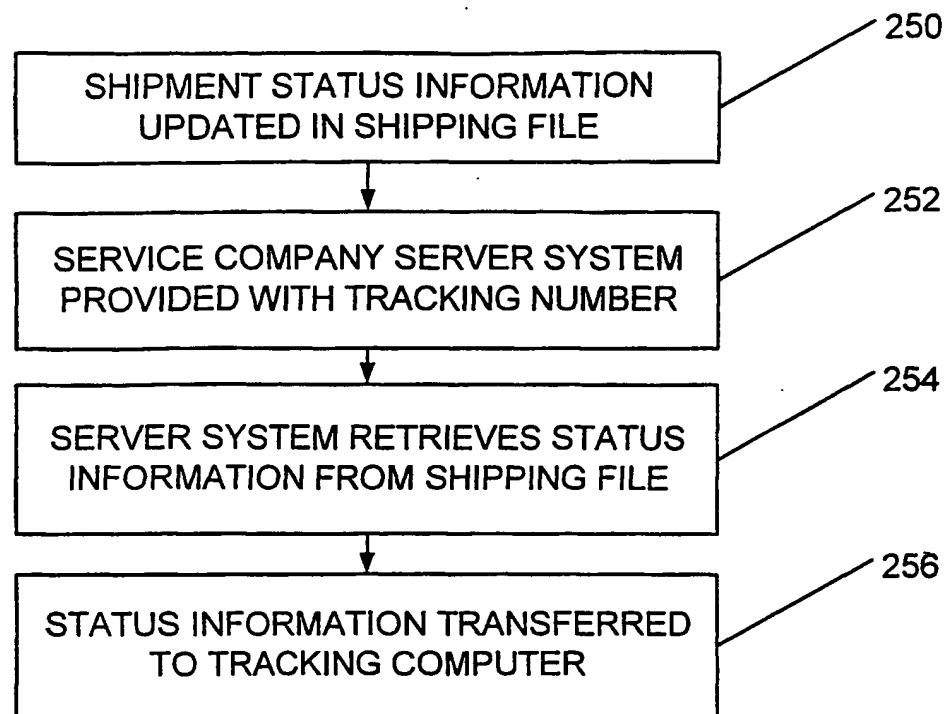


FIG. 13.

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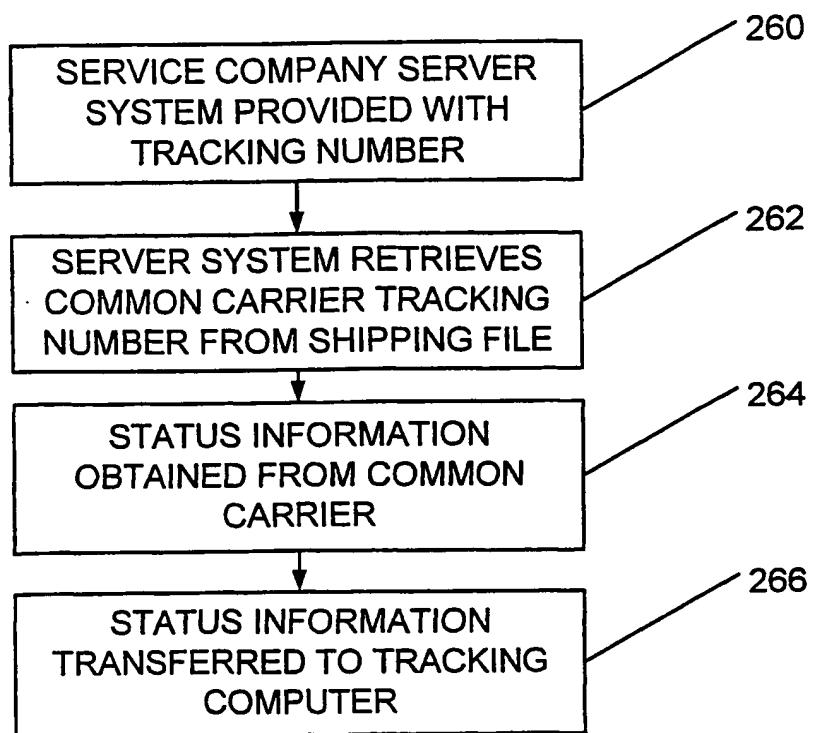


FIG. 14.

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Shipping	Tracking	Ship Locations	Service Guide	Help	Login	Register
----------	----------	----------------	---------------	------	-------	----------

**SHIPMENT TRACKING**

Enter the NeoTrak  
number  
of a package you wish  
to track:

**NEXT** **FIG. 15.**

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## SHIPMENT DETAILS

Origin
Country: \$USER_COUNTRY Zip Code: \$ZIPSRC
Destination
Name: \$DEST_NAME Address: \$DEST_ADD \$DEST_CITY, \$DEST_STATE \$DEST_ZIP \$DEST_COUNTRY email: \$DEST_EMAIL
Weight
\$WEIGHT
Drop Off Point
\$DP
Transport
Carrier: \$CARRIER Service: \$SERVICE Price: \$PRICE

BACK

FIG. 16.

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/06000

## A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : G06F 17/60

US CL : 705/22

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/22

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EAST search terms: "tracking number", "common carrier", "parcel"

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,485,369 A (Nicholls et al.) 16 January 1996, the entire document	1-33
A	US 5,631,827 A (Nicholls et al.) 20 May 1997, the entire document.	1-33
A	US 5,770,841 A (Moed et al.) 23 June 1998, the entire document.	1-33
A	US 5,940,835 A (Sit) 17 August 1999, the entire document.	1-33
A	US 5,971,587 A (Kato et al.) 26 October 1999, the entire document.	1-33

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

• Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)		
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"Z"	document member of the same patent family
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search

19 APRIL 2001

Date of mailing of the international search report

08 MAY 2001

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US  
Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks  
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Washington, D.C. 20231

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Authorized officer

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Telephone No. (703) 305-3900

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